

*Ps. 14*

*Luke 15:1-10*

*Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Evie Macway*

*September 11, 2022*

## Pieces

“Rejoice with me for I have found my sheep that was lost.”

Do you remember the movie, *Finding Nemo*? It was a favorite in our house for many years. It is beginning to become a favorite again now that we have grandchildren. I am not sure if it is because I spent some time recently down at the aquarium in Monterey or because I just really like the film, but the colorful story of a fish named Nemo and his father came back to me this week as I reflected on our stories from the gospel of Luke that we read together this morning.

*Finding Nemo* is one of those animated movies Disney is famous for, geared to children but great fun for adults as well. It is an absolutely beautiful film to see, full of color and animation that sparks the imagination. In case you missed it or have become a little fuzzy on the details of the film, *Finding Nemo* is a story about an adventurous little clownfish named Nemo and his loving but a bit overprotective father, Marlin. On his first day of school Nemo, in an attempt to prove to his friends how brave he is, gets in harms way and finds himself snatched from the ocean and put into a fish tank, on display with several other colorful tropical fish.

The remainder of the story focuses on Marlin and the things he goes through in order to find his son. In his search for Nemo, among other things, Marlin must navigate through a 12 step meeting of a trio of sharks trying to curb their desire to eat fish (“Fish are friends, not food.”), a school of stinging jelly fish, some really radical sea turtles and some time spent in the belly of a whale. Marlin does all of this with the assistance of a new friend that he can’t seem to live with, but he can’t seem to live without, Dori, a fish with no short term memory but a big heart and an uncanny knack for teaching trust. Dori is voiced by Ellen DeGenerous. *Finding Nemo* is a story of love and commitment and the lengths to which one will go to find one who is lost.

The scripture passage we read this morning from Luke is all about searching and finding. These two familiar stories about the shepherd who leaves the 99 to search for the one lost sheep and the woman who turns her house upside down looking for her one lost coin, along with the other famous Biblical parable about lost and found that follows immediately in Luke, the story of the prodigal son, are stories Jesus tells to teach us something about God. The shepherd, the woman and the father in the story of the prodigal son, remind us of just how much God values each one of us.

These are familiar stories, with themes that bring both comfort and challenge, as so much of scripture does. If you were here last Sunday and remember our words from Luke we heard then, the verses just immediately preceding these here, our words this morning are a welcome change.

In *Finding Nemo*, Nemo was captured and taken to far off Sydney as he was behaving in direct disobedience of his father. But the disobedience of his child did not *for a moment* keep Marlin from searching for his son who was lost. In the case of the sheep and the coin in our stories this morning it is even simpler. For the coin certainly, and the sheep most probably, there was no intentional disobedience involved. God's mercy is vast. God's desire to find us does not wait for us to want to find God. God seeks us.

The context in which Jesus tells these parables makes this very clear. According to Luke, the religious authorities are grumbling because Jesus, 'welcomes sinners and eats with them.' In response to their complaints he tells these stories. Each story is one of the vastness of God's mercy, forgiveness and grace. God we come to know through Jesus does not wait for us to be without sin. These parables would tell us that God does not even wait for us to want God. God seeks us. Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them. Jesus came to them. It is not about our worthiness. It is all about God's mercy and God's desire for us. Each one of us is important, valuable, loved by God.

How many of you do jigsaw puzzles? They can be a lot of fun, but when you lose a piece or two they can be frustrating too. Puzzle people, how much time have you spent looking for that last piece that went missing? The picture is just not complete without every piece! The one who is searching in each of these stories rejoices greatly when the one who is lost is found. Not one sheep or coin, or piece is dispensable. Each one is essential and valuable.

This affirmation struck me particularly this week as I read these stories. Soon we will begin to hearing more about our upcoming Stewardship campaign. That time of year is approaching when we will again be asked to commit some of what we have and who we are to the life and ministry of Stone Church of Willow Glen. Each year we are asked to commit not only our dollars, (those are important) but also our time and our talents.

More details will follow soon, but I look forward to this time every year because it helps us bring into focus all over again the variety and the beauty, as well as the number of ‘pieces’ there are to the picture that is the Stone Church community. (Like the artwork on the cover of our bulletin this morning.) And how important each one is. The current work, involving so many of you, on preparing Roycott house for the refugee family is a great example. Each person, each piece, each gift is important.

I said earlier that these stories in Luke bring comfort and challenge. The comfort is clear. God’s love for us, God’s mercy and grace know no bounds. God seeks us out, just as we are. The challenge here comes when we, in response to that amazing grace we know through Christ, try to live that grace and love into our world. If Jesus teaches us that God’s mercy and forgiveness is for all people, where and how does justice fit in? If each and every person is valuable and essential to God, where do we begin in the face of poverty, war, abuse and illness? These are good questions and ones we must weave amid the affirmation and assurance of these stories. Challenges in our lives of faith.

There is a point in *Finding Nemo* when Dori and Marlin (the dad) are in the belly of the whale. They have teamed up to try to find Nemo. They are a good pair. Marlin is smart, practical, and cautious and knows the dangers that lurk in his undersea world. Dori, with no short term memory at all, has a wonderful gift for living in the moment. Marlin is convinced that their journey is over. They will never find his son, Nemo. They will never get out of the whale.

Dori, on the other hand, is confident that she can talk with the whale and that the whale has told her how they will get out, things will be okay. There is back and forth with Dori having a ‘conversation’ with the whale in ‘whale speak,’ whale sounds. The water inside the whale begins to recede, pulling Marlin and Dori down deeper into the whale as they cling to the whale’s tongue in order to avoid being swept completely down into the deep, darkness, that in this story is the belly of the whale. That deep darkness may be other places for us... Dori implores Marlin to

let go, that the whale has told her that they must let go in order to be saved. I love that illustration!! They must let go in order to be saved. Sound familiar?

Finally Marlin shuts his eyes and lets go and the two are swept down into the whale, only to be swished in a beautiful explosion of water and light, through the whale's blow hole and out into the world again. (That scene just brings me to tears every time.) They did eventually find Nemo.

The shepherd and the woman celebrated when they found what they had lost. Each piece is important to God. Each one of us can trust in God's mercy. And each one of us can know that we too are an important piece in God's creation. Amen.